Installation Address

By

Robert C. Rae, B.A., B.S.W., S.Th.

Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Sir George Williams University

On the occasion of his installation on October 19, 1962

Mr. Chancellor, My Lord Archbishop, Members of Convocation, Honoured Representatives of Sister Institutions, Ladies and Gentlemen:

WITH the Chancellor's kind permission I would like to join with him in the words of welcome which he has extended to you. We are, indeed, greatly honoured by the presence of our distinguished guests. The attendance of representatives from our sister institutions of learning makes clear to all of us the bonds that bind us together in our worthy educational endeavours.

May I also express my sincere appreciation to the very Reverend Father Legare for the warm and kind greetings which he has extended. We, in turn, would pay tribute to him for his fine leadership of the University of Ottawa and for the invaluable service that he rendered to education during his term just completed as President of the National Conference of Canadian Universities and Colleges.

I am particularly appreciative of the presence of our revered Archbishop who has so kindly agreed to participate in this Convocation. His fine record of service for so many years to the people of his Diocese and Archdiocese is a model for all of us. I am also grateful for the presence here of representatives from the churches, the theological colleges and other educational organizations. I wish that time would allow me to pay tribute to each of our distinguished guests.

I beg the indulgence of the honoured representatives of institutions of higher learning in saying a few words to the Provost of the University of Trinity College and to Professor Byles of the School of Social Work of the University of Toronto. I would say to them that I continue to be deeply grateful to the institutions which they represent for the illuminating contribution which each made to my own personal education.

The words of our beloved Principal Emeritus deeply moved me. The words are accepted with gratitude and humility, but I will always treasure the pricelesss opportunity that I have had to be associated with this great Christian gentleman. One of Dr. Hall's favourite sayings is: "Practice what you preach and preach what you practice." His constant manner has exemplified practice that contains all one needs for a text in preaching about the good life.

We are especially honoured by the presence of the distinguished Vice-Chancellor of McGill University. In his remarks at the Founder's Day Convocation of that great institution of learning some two weeks ago, Dr. James drew attention to his ceremonial gown which he stated had adorned four principals of McGill University. I am sorry that I cannot succeed to the gown of my honoured predecessor. I may have the margin in physical size, but I wish that I could rise to the spiritual stature of our Principal Emeritus.

I quote from Dr. Hall's own installation address words that are most appropriate for this occasion. In his customary modest manner he said: "This event is, of course, not primarily for me. I am on this occasion but a symbol. Institutions, if they be good, worthy and democratic are not determined nor controlled by one person. Individuals come and go and the best contribution of the individual is so to build that the institution may better serve." These sentiments I share to the full; I pray that I may be able to make some contribution to the further development of Sir George, but I know, very well, that growth will only take place through the united efforts of all of those associated with it.

Later, in this same address, Dr. Hall went on to say: "We have a Board of Governors and a Faculty Council as well as administrative officers of our several divisions and units. I am a member of a team." I, too, fully recognize how dependent Sir George is on the members of the Corporation, our Governors, members of the faculty, administrative officers, alumni and students, and our friends in this and other communities. We must all work together to maintain and extend the contribution of Sir George in the field of education. I can only hope that I can be an effective member of this team and play some part in helping all of these important groupings to enhance our endeavours.

Last Spring I was invited by "The Georgian", the student newspaper of the University, to write an article on the future of Sir George. Everyone reads the students newspaper. In our case, because of our evening students, "The Georgian" finds its way into offices and factories as well as into homes. The topic assigned was "The Future of Sir George" and I found it to be a challenging one: I have selected this topic as being appropriate to this occasion.

In the newspaper article I began as follows: "What will the University of 2,000 A.D. be like? Will it consist of a transmitter station and a space platform off which television signals will be 'bounced' into the homes of a hundred thousand students? Will teaching machines and electronic devices replace the professor in the classroom? Will science develop other equally revolutionary media for the dissemination of knowledge?" This is fanciful speculation, of course, but last week I stood outside the door of a Physics testing center. Each minute a bell rang and one student emerged from the room containing twelve students as another entered. By electronic means over 1,000 laboratory tests are conducted each week in an efficient and orderly manner. The process conserves human effort, avoids human error and enables students and faculty to frequently test progress.

I am not going to answer my earlier questions in the affirmative. I do not see the passing away of the person-to-person contact so necessary in the educational process. However, I am a strong supporter of modern means that can aid and can contribute to educational effort. The questions serve to indicate the rapidity of change in this remarkable second-half of the 20th century. Despite the uncertainty of our times, however, we must still plan within the frame-work of our knowledge and with the guidance of the clues we can gather with regard to the future. But, no matter what may happen, the Sir George of the future, I am sure, will reflect the heritage of its past.

The philosophy which produced Sir George can be found in embryo in the very first annual report of the Young Men's Christian Association as given in London, England, one hundred and seventeen years ago. In this report it was stated that the objectives of the new association were: "the spiritual and mental development of the young men in the drapery trades." From the very first, education was an integral part of the programme and method of the Y.M.C.A.—education with objectives, be it noted, for "young men in the .. *trades*." This institution, deriving its name form the founder of the Y.M.C.A., continues to serve the men and women—'of the *trades*', and from countless diverse fields of commerce and industry—through its evening classes.

The Montreal Y.M.C.A., founded in 1851, instituted formal unit courses in 1873; and, certainly, educational activities featured its programme from the beginning. The Sir George Williams University and Schools traces its origin to these first formal classes. Describing this early development gives me the opportunity to identify myself closely with the operation of our Schools—for the Office of Principal has to do with the Schools as well as with the University. Actually, the University grew directly out of the evening high school when the first courses at the undergraduate level were offered in 1929. One can be justly proud of being associated with the Sir George Williams Schools and express admiration for the administrators and teachers who serve them well. In the academic year 1961-62 four thousand two hundred and ninety students were enrolled in the Schools with over three thousand of them registered in an evening high school which makes an amazing contribution to the education of Canadians and Canadians-to-be at all age levels. The offices of this city are filled with graduates of the Business School; the Retail School sends well prepared graduates into the massive successors to the drapery trades, while commercial and creative art endeavours are enhanced by those coming from our School of Art.

How has this institution, University and Schools together, translated its general and ultimate purpose—the spiritual and mental development of people—into more proximate objectives? We can get some understanding of this from a valued document, developed in 1945, by our late, revered Principal, Dr. Kenneth E. Norris. This document is entitled "A Memorandum Regarding the College's Conception of Its Function" and many here tonight will know that I have already borrowed freely from it. Dr Norris discerned five strands which he stated had guided the academic policy of Sir George over the years. I propose to examine these strands, not in detail but by way of commentary.

The first two strands of Dr. Norris' statement read as follows:

1. That the growth of persons be the primary criterion in determining academic method and evaluating effectiveness.

2. That the needs of people be the first consideration in determining course offerings.

I have chosen to treat these two statements together as they seem to reflect the concern and interest in persons that has come to be identified in our minds as a first attribute. Some of us are critical of this emphasis and point out that the concern of a university has to do with the intellect. It is true that our entry into membership in the National Conference of Canadian Universities and Colleges, the charter from the Provincial Government which recognized Sir George in its own right and the change in name from that of 'College' to 'University' in comparatively recent years has modified our orientation. We have a growing self-awareness as a 'University' and our patterns of relationships have moved to a closer identification with our sister institutions of higher learning in Canada, in the Commonwealth and, indeed, throughout the world. The words 'excellence' and 'scholarship' are, perhaps, more frequently used and we give most serious consideration to the setting of high standards of intellectual performance.

Excellence of effort has become as much a part of our purpose as the concern we have inherited from our Y.M.C.A. founders for the growth and development of persons. I find no conflict in the seeking of excellence and a companion concern for persons; rather I feel them to be complementary aspects which when fostered lead to the best kind of academic achievement. How one can develop and grow effectively without stretching one's self to meet high standards is not apparent to me.

The third item in the list developed by Dr. Norris reads in this manner:

> That vocational competency is one of these needs, and therefore an acceptable and laudable aim.

This item is designed to promote controversy as there are those who claim that anything that smacks of vocationalism is unacceptable at the level of academic work. One would agree with those who argue in this vein if it were true that the term vocation has only to do with techniques and mechanical skill. But the University has need for a concern for the vocational activities of its students and graduates. Dr. Norris often refers to the goal of education as 'learning to live significantly'. One would wonder where significance, for the most part, occurs if it is not in the daily tasks of our vocations. Fortunately it seems now agreed that preparation for occupation is best served by developing one's mind and attitudes so that one may adopt broad learning to the particularities of one's calling. Industry and commerce seek people who are educable and can respond with ideas and flexibility to the rapidly changing conditions of our times. University education should make a contribution to vocation by going about its normal task of developing the powers of thought, concentration and objective analysis.

The fourth hypothesis which Dr. Norris put forward in his admirable document states:

> That generalization in programme offers the greatest hope for the achievement of the spiritual, aesthetic and social values of education and the promotion of unified personal growth.

Sir George, in its various curricula, still expects all students to have some exposure to all of the major areas of knowledge. The Science student must take courses in the Humanities and the Social Sciences; the Arts student is required to select subjects from the Natural Sciences; while the Commerce student is faced with requirements in all of these areas. In this way the breadth of a liberally-based education is imposed on the opportunities for depth in areas of specialization through upper-years advanced courses, "majors", and now, in 1962-63, through Honours courses in certain fields. One would hope, with Dr. Norris, though, that a liberal and general education comes not merely through the accumulation of various courses but by integration. Each individual course can be approached from the viewpoint of general education; through study of its relationships to other subjects, its place in the fabric of civilization, its role in the life of man, as apart from its own intrinsic contribution to the whole of knowledge.

Finally, in this inadequate consideration of the vitally important guides provided by Dr. Norris, I come to his fifth and final point:

> That from the point of view of society, each unmet educational need, each individual not given education commensurate with his ability, represents a social wastage and a challenge to action on the part of the College (now University).

I become dismayed when I read articles urging universities that the way to deal with the great numbers of applicants who are seeking admission is to become more selective; to raise standards of admission. I, for one, would hope that institutions of higher learning would give leadership to a movement to ensure that all of those who have the ability to benefit by university study should be able to find the means and a place to demonstrate this ability. The academic records of Sir George reveal the stories of many students who have attained high scholastic competence despite the fact that their admission certificates barely met the minimum standard. Our modest appraisal of these students has been validated by their continued fine academic accomplishments in the graduate schools of this continent and of other lands. Many who would not have been admitted, if the urgings of those who would be more selective had been heeded, have gone on to occupy distinguished places in the professional and business endeavours of this City. I believe that university education can not be limited to the privileged few, but must be made available to all who can absorb it. Our democratic way of life supports this view and the needs of our society for educated persons gives practical endorsement to this principle.

But if this democratic and practical goal is to be achieved—that each person should have the opportunity to obtain an education commensurate with his ability—then the educational institutions must be given the wholehearted support of public bodies and private citizens throughout our land. The educational institutions of Quebec have been greatly enheartened by

the assistance that is now being provided by our provincial legislature. But support must come from all sources if the universities and schools of this country are to have the facilities, equipment, staff and finances needed to meet the challenge. Every person here must be very familiar with the latest prediction with regard to university enrollment in the future. In his statement to the National Conference of Canadian Universities and Colleges, meeting in Ottawa last November, Dr. E. F. Sheffied drew our attention to the fact that in the 1960-61 academic year there were 114,000 full-time students in our universities and colleges. He went on to report that an objective analysis of statistics pointed to a total of 312,000 students in 1970; an increase in ten years of nearly two and three-quarter times the enrollment of 1960-61. It must be evident to every serious-minded citizen, in public office or engaged in private occupation, that this creates a problem of enormous proportions. It can only be solved by beginning now to provide our educational institutions with the means that they must have if education in Canada is to fulfil the objectives it has in our democratic society.

For four years the Planning Committee of our Board of Governors gave continuous careful attention to the developmental needs and potentiality of this institution for educational service. Now, due to the diligence and painstaking efforts of faculty members and administrative officers the plans for the next physical expansion of Sir George are complete. The implementation of these plans will enable us to accommodate 5,000 day university students and in excess of 10,000 university students in the evening division. We will be enabled to introduce studies at the graduate level, in appropriate areas, and we will be able to offer our basic and primary undergraduate programme with increased effectiveness.

The necessary site has been acquired and, hopefully, we are in the final stages of negotiation with municipal and provincial governments for certain important arrangements for the construction of a new building. We hope that those in authority will recognize the great contribution of Sir George to the welfare of this community and this province. Thousands of citizens and citizens-to-be have benefited from educational activities in the University and Schools. A recent study of graduates of the University, now some 5,000 in total, has shown that 81% of the alumni are living in Montreal or the immediate vicinity. It is obvious from these facts that Montreal commercial, industrial and educational institutions, and many other organizations, have gained immeasurably from the contribution of those who have studied at Sir George. We call upon the public authorities of City and Province, upon the responsible citizens of this and other communities, upon our alumni and friends to provide the means whereby Sir George can meet its share of the educational demands and needs of the present and immediate future.

At a time of great crisis, Sir Winston Churchill, in his apt way, cried: "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job." In a time of educational crisis we at Sir George say: "Give us the facilities, the equipment, and adequate financial support and we, in company with our sister institutions, will move to meet the unmet and pressing educational needs of our day."